

County Longford Public Participation Network

Representatives Charter

Some Terminology

For simplicity the following shortcuts in terminology have been taken

Committee – is used to include all Committees, Boards, Steering Groups or other structures that representatives are involved in.

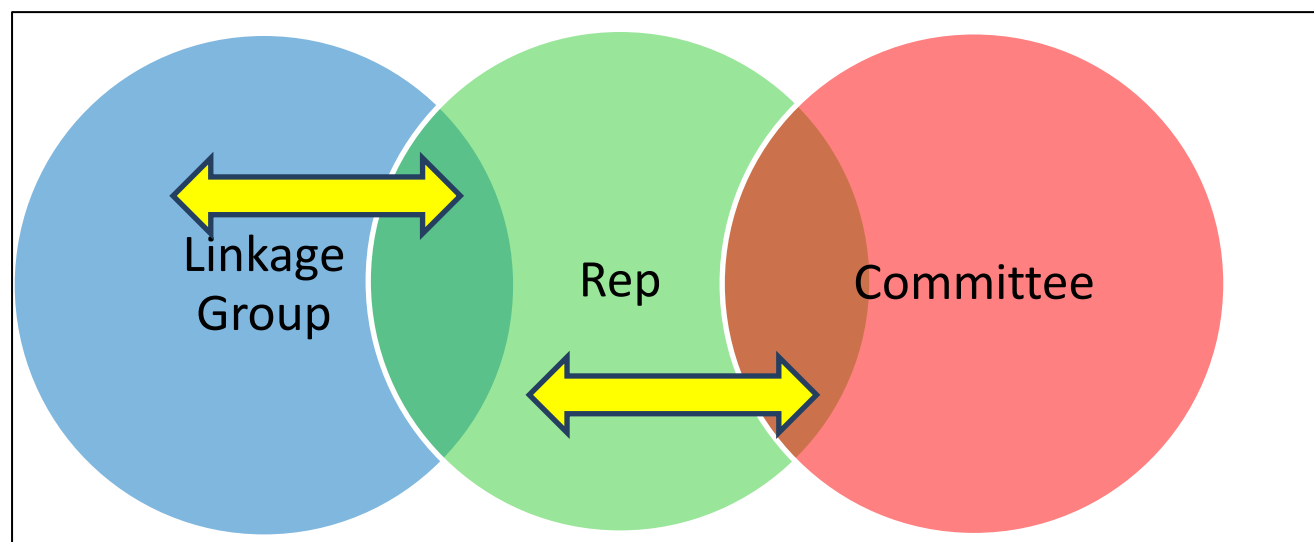
Communication – includes all forms of communication, written, verbal, electronic, email, website, social media, blogs etc. The key point is to agree a way of communicating which is inclusive, and acceptable to the group members and the rep. The next step is to implement and monitor it. It is very possible that different Linkage Groups will use different mechanisms.

Meetings – covers all forms of meetings: face to face, e-mail, virtual i.e. Skype, group chats, Facebook closed groups etc.

Introduction

Effective representation of the community and voluntary, social inclusion and environmental sectors via County Longford PPN on boards and committees of the Local Authority and Others is dependent on three key relationships as shown below. Each body has a key role to play and each relationship brings with it certain rights and responsibilities. This document attempts to address those roles, rights and responsibilities.

Key to all these relationships is clear communication between everybody who is involved.



All involved should follow the key principles of County Longford PPN – i.e. Inclusive, Participatory, Independent, Valuing Diversity, Transparent and Accountable.

Linkage Group

A Linkage group for a Committee is a collection of County Longford PPN member organisations with a particular interest in the issues being discussed at that committee. County Longford PPN will invite member groups to join a Linkage group, and all who wish to join can do so.

Role of the Linkage Group is to

- Elect rep(s) to the Committee.
- Discuss and debate the matters being discussed by the Committee, to inform the rep, and where relevant to prioritise and develop policy positions.
- To mandate the rep to bring forward the diversity of views within the Linkage group to the Committee.
- Agree and implement a way of communicating with the rep(s), which is effective and realistic.
- With the Secretariat to censure / remove the rep(s) if they are not fulfilling the terms of the charter.
- To work with the County Longford PPN Secretariat and report to the Plenary as relevant.

Responsibilities of Linkage Group members are to

- Make themselves aware of what the Committee they are linked to can and cannot do, having realistic expectations of what the rep can achieve, and understanding confidentiality issues which may arise.
- Be open to new organisations joining the Linkage Group, and in particular to seek the input of all groups who have an interest in the area, particularly those who are traditionally excluded.
- Communicate and engage clearly and openly with the rep and other Linkage group members, recognising that there may be differing views expressed on issues, and that the rep must bring the diversity of views to the committee.
- Take the time to read, absorb and understand communications that are received.
- Seek to develop realistic policy proposals to address issues raised and support the rep to bring views forward, by providing relevant facts and research where possible.
- Feed back to their own member groups on the work of the Linkage Group and Committee.

Rights of the Linkage Group members are to

- Receive relevant information about the work of the committee to help them to participate fully.
- Receive regular communications (at least as frequently as meetings are held) from the rep on matters such as
 - Dates of committee meetings
 - Agendas for committee meetings
 - Reports from committee meetings
 - Items which require their input
- Have regular discussions by an agreed mechanism (face to face / email / telephone etc)
- Have their issues brought forward by the rep.
- Have Linkage group discussions facilitated in an open inclusive way, and the views of all members accommodated.

Representative

A rep is elected for a fixed term to represent the issues of County Longford PPN members on a particular committee. Their election takes place according to procedures established by the Secretariat and approved by the Plenary.

Role of the Representative is to


- Attend and participate fully in meetings of the Linkage Group and committee, including any subgroups to which they may be appointed
- Bring forward the issues of the Linkage group to the committee for their consideration, including putting items on the agenda. They are not there just to represent their own group or agenda.
- Work collaboratively with the Linkage Group to identify issues, research, policy proposals etc.
- Communicate regularly (at least as frequently as meetings are held) with the Linkage Group on matters such as
 - Dates of committee meetings
 - Agendas for committee meetings
 - Reports and Feedback from committee meetings
 - Items which require their input or are of interest
- Ensure adequate minutes are taken at Linkage Group meetings and a PPN feedback form filled out.
- Network and work strategically with other committee members for the benefit of the Linkage group and of the wider County Longford PPN, including being able to compromise while retaining the core objective.

Responsibilities of the Representative are to

- Organise Linkage Group Meetings and effective two way communications with Linkage Group members [with the support of the development officer where required].
- Be able to use basic electronic communications effectively (i.e. email and internet browsing)
- Prepare thoroughly for, attend and participate actively in Linkage Group and Committee meetings solely on behalf of County Longford PPN, leaving any personal, business or political interests outside.
- Work openly and collaboratively with all Linkage Group members to identify issues, research, policy proposals etc., respecting the diversity of views expressed.
- Put forward opinions / views of Linkage Group to Committee and feedback the work of the committee clearly to the Linkage Group
- Attend relevant training or networking events organised by County Longford PPN or the Committee.
- Be open and honest in dealings with all stakeholders
- Build positive relationships with other committee members for the benefit of the County Longford PPN.
- Portray County Longford PPN and the Linkage Group in a positive and constructive way.

Rights of the representative are to

- Have active engagement from the Linkage Group, including timely responses to issues.
- Be heard and respected by both the Linkage Group and Committee, with an appreciation that they are a volunteer.
- Be supported by both Linkage Group and Committee members, understanding that County Longford PPN is a new and evolving process.
- Have access to an agreed outcome statement from meetings which can be circulated immediately afterwards. (feedback form)
- Receive relevant training to enable them to participate effectively on the Committee
- Receive expenses for attending committee meetings.

- Receive an induction pack for the committee on taking up appointment to include
 - Terms of reference
 - Standing orders /procedures
 - Meeting schedules, locations and times
 - Contact details for all committee members
 - Access to technical support where required
 - Receive timely notice of meetings (at least two weeks in advance, and more if possible) including
 - Dates and venues
 - Agenda
 - Documents to be read
 - Have meetings conducted in a way that facilitates participation, open discussion and transparent decision making.
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The Committee

The way in which the Committee conducts its business has a huge impact on the effectiveness of County Longford PPN representation. An overformal and rigid process can make participation difficult. The following rights and responsibilities are generally within the remit of the Chair or Chief Officer (or equivalent). The majority are likely to be already in place.

Responsibilities of the Committee are

- To have and communicate a clear terms of reference and procedures / standing orders and vision for the committee.
- To hold regular meetings at times, dates and locations that facilitate the participation of volunteers. Ideally these dates should be set annually.
- To hold an induction meeting and have an induction pack for new members to explain the processes and procedures of the committee.
- To set the agenda in consultation with members and to enable members to place items on the agenda.
- To give one month's notice of meetings and to circulate the agenda and any documentation for reading at absolute minimum two weeks in advance. This is to facilitate County Longford PPN members to consult with their linkage group before the meeting and to ensure that members have adequate information with which to make comments and decisions.
- To chair the meeting in an open and transparent way as to enable and value the contribution of all members and fosters a culture of active listening. This should include giving enough time for discussion and deliberation of items, and if required setting up subgroups to bring recommendations to the main committee. Decisions should be made in an open and transparent way.
- To ensure that any conflicts of interest are clearly stated and dealt with appropriately.
- To include all points of discussion within the minutes, and not to dismiss those which may be considered "only relevant to a few".
- To pay travel and other expenses to members. (where appropriate)
- To offer relevant training to all members and to provide support to members in interpreting technical documents.
- To review the workings of the committee on a regular basis and to take on board any recommendations.

Rights of the Committee

- Members will attend meetings, or send their alternate (where possible).
- Members will prepare thoroughly for meetings, and be able to contribute fully.
- Members will feedback to their relevant organisations/structure.
- Members will fully take part in the workings of the committee including participation in subgroups, consultations etc.
- Members will be open and honest in their dealings with the committee, declaring any conflicts of interest.